

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 IO-13 ISO-00 AF-10 ACDA-07 CIAE-00  
DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05  
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIE-00 SSO-00 INRE-00  
NSCE-00 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /090 W  
-----252126Z 043644 /72

O R 251920Z MAY 77  
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7880  
INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN  
AMEMBASSY BONN  
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST  
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST  
USDEL SALT II GENEVA  
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMCONSUL MUNICH  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
USLO PEKING  
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE  
AMEMBASSY SOFIA  
AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 7373

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, UR  
SUBJECT: CPSU PLENUM: WHY DID PODGORNY GO?

REF: MOSCOW 7291 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: IN THE TOTAL ABSENCE OF HARD INFORMATION ON THE  
BACKGROUND OF AND REASONS FOR PODGORNYY'S REMOVAL FROM  
THE POLITBURO, WE OFFER A RUN-DOWN OF THE MOST PLAUSIBLE  
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LINES OF SPECULATION NOW CURRENT IN MOSCOW, WITH OUR  
INITIAL, HIGHLY TENTATIVE COMMENT;

--HE LEFT VOLUNTARILY (IMPOSSIBLE TO BELIEVE);  
--HE WAS REMOVED SO BREZHNEV CAN TAKE HIS PLACE,  
WHILE REMAINING PARTY CHIEF (MOST LIKELY) OR WHILE  
GRADUALLY DISENGAGING FROM HIS PARTY ROLE (LESS LIKELY);

--HE WAS REMOVED TO MAKE A PLACE UPSTAIRS FOR KOSYGIN, WHO IN TURN WOULD BE REPLACED AS PREMIER (PLAUSIBLE);  
--HE WAS OUSTED IN THE AFTERMATH OF A POLICY DISPUTE (POSSIBLE, BUT NOT LIKELY);  
--BREZHNEV IS THE WINNER (VIRTUALLY CERTAIN).  
FURTHER EVIDENCE SHOULD BE AVAILABLE SHORTLY TO CAST LIGHT ON THIS DEVELOPMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. THE SUDDEN REMOVAL OF PODGORNYY FROM THE POLITBURO TOOK MOSCOW'S DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY--AND TO ALL APPEARANCES USUALLY WELL INFORMED SOVIET OFFICIALS--BY SURPRISE. SPECULATION, NATURALLY, IS RIFE, BUT WE HAVE THUS FAR NO HARD EVIDENCE WHATSOEVER TO PROVIDE AN INTERPRETATION. DEPARTMENT AND ADDRESSEE POSTS MAY, HOWEVER, FIND USEFUL A RUN-DOWN ON THE LINES OF CURRENT SPECULATION HERE AND OUR INITIAL AND HIGHLY TENTATIVE COMMENT ON THEM.

2. HYPOTHESIS ONE: VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT. ALTHOUGH THEORETICALLY POSSIBLE, WE CONSIDER THIS HYPOTHESIS VIRTUALLY EXCLUDABLE FROM SERIOUS CONSIDERATION. ALTHOUGH PODGORNYY IS THE OLDEST (74) OF THE THREE TOP LEADERS, HIS PHYSICAL HEALTH HAS, TO ALL APPEARANCES, BEEN THE BEST. PODGORNYY RECENTLY COMPLETED, WITHOUT ANY APPARENT PROBLEMS, WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN A GRELING TRIP TO AFRICA. IN CONTRAST TO THE OTHER TWO MEMBERS OF THE TRIUMVIRATE, THERE HAVE NOT BEEN FREQUEST RUMORS ABOUT HIS BEING IN POOR HEALTH.

3. EVEN MORE PERTINENT, THE FACT THAT THE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT STATED SIMPLY THAT PODGORNYY WAS "FREED FROM HIS DUTIES" AS A CONFIDENTIAL

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MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO, WITHOUT ANY SORT OF QUALIFICATION. RECENT PRACTICE HAS BEEN TO PROVIDE AT LEAST A FIG LEAF WHEN POLITBURO MEMBERS WERE REMOVED. VORONOV AND SHELEST, WHO DEPARTED THE POLITBURO IN APRIL 1973, LEFT "IN CONNECTION WITH GOING ON PENSION." SHELEPIN, WHO WAS REMOVED IN APRIL 1975, LEFT "AT HIS OWN REQUEST." KHRUSHCHEV WAS RELIVED "IN CONNECTION WITH HIS ADVANCED YEARS AND DETERIORATING HEALTH." PODGORNYY LEFT WITHOUT ANY QUALIFIERS. FOR THESE REASONS, OUR INITIAL CONCLUSION IS THAT PODGORNYY WAS FORCED OUT OF THE OFFICE AGAINST HIS WILL. THE HARD, AND YET UNANSWERABLE, QUESTION IS WHY.

4. HYPOTHESIS TWO: BREZHNEV ELDER STATEMAN. THIS HYPOTHESIS HAS THREE BROAD VARIANTS:  
A. THAT BREZHNEV NEEDED TO FREE THE POSITION SO THAT HE COULD ASSUME IT HIMSELF, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY CLINGING TO HIS GENERAL SECRETARYSHIP OF THE PARTY.  
B. BREZHNEV NEEDED TO FREE THE POSITION SO THAT HE COULD MOVE INTO IT SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH A GRADUAL DIVESTITURE OF HIS PARTY RESPONSIBILITIES, IN THE HOPE OF CONTROLLING A SUCCESSION

SCENARIO BEFORE HIS DEMISE.

C. THE PODGORNYY REMOVAL IS A PRELUDE TO A CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WHICH WOULD ESTABLISH A "PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM" WITH BREZHNEV ASSUMING AN ENHANCED CHIEF-OF-STATE POSITION.

5. OF THESE VARIANTS, WE FIND THE FIRST THE MOST PLAUSIBLE. BY COMBINING THE TWO ROLES, BREZHNEV COULD MARK THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION WITH A NEW "BREZHNEV" CONSTITUTION, PARTY LEADERSHIP AND THE TITULAR LEADERSHIP OF THE SOVIET STATE, THE LATTER OF SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE TO HIM, THOUGH THE POSITION IS DVOID OF REAL POWER. WHEN IT IS FINALLY REVEALED, THE NEW CONSTITUTION, A DRAFT OF WHICH WAS APPROVED BY THE PLENUM, MAY REDEFINE THE ROLE OF THE CHIEF OF STATE IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT WILL BE EASIER FOR BREZHNEV TO OCCUPY AND RETAIN THAT POSITION. WE ARE STRUCK IN THIS CONNECTION THAT BREZHNEV'S REPORT TO THE PLENUM ON THE CONSTITUTION MENTIONED THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER "SOCIALIST" COUNTRIES. OUR RECORDS SHOW THAT IN SEVEN OF THE "SOCIALIST" COUNTRIES, THE

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PARTY LEADER IS ALSO HEAD OF STATE.

6. WE CONTINUE TO DOUBT THAT BREZHNEV WOULD VOLUNTARILY RELINQUISH HIS PARTY POSITION (VARIANT B) PARTICULARLY SINCE IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT TO DO SO AND STILL CONTROL SUCCESSION MANEUVERING. HE MAY NEVERTHELESS WANT TO TRY. IN THIS CASE, HE COULD AT SOME SUBSEQUENT POINT CHOOSE TO DIVEST HIMSELF OF THE PARTY LEADERSHIP, PASSING IT TO HIS CHOSEN SUCCESSOR. THUS, HE COULD SEEK TO OVERSEE HIS SUCCESSION AND THE PARTY GENERALLY, BOTH IN PERSON AND BY PROXY.

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7. AS FOR THE THIRD VARIANT, WE ARE ALSO DUBIOUS THAT THE CONSTI-

TUTIONAL CHANGE WOULD BE SO DRAMATIC (DESPITE THE INTRIGUING  
REFERENCE IN BREZHNEV'S PLENUM STATEMENT REGARDING THE EXPERIENCE  
OF FRATERNAL STATES). ASSUMING AN ENHANCED "PRESIDENCY"  
WOULD SEEM TO SUIT BREZHNEV'S PURPOSES LESS THAN A COMBINATION OF REAL

PARTY LEADERSHIP AND TITULAR STATE SUPREMACY. SOME SOVIET SOURCES  
WHO PLAUSIBLY CLAIM TO BE INFORMED ON THE POINT HAVE ASSURED  
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US CATEGORICALLY THAT THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION DOES NOT EMBODY ANY  
MAJOR CHANGES OF HIGHER USSR STATE ORGANS.

8. HYPOTHESIS THREE: KOSYGIN UPSTAIRS. IN THIS HYPOTHESIS,  
BREZHNEV REMAINS AS GENERAL SECRETARY, AND IT IS KOSYGIN WHO  
MOVES UP TO BECOME TITULAR HEAD OF STATE. IF IT WERE TO BE  
KOSGYIN, THIS MOVE WOULD ALLOW A YOUNGER, MORE ACTIVE MAN TO  
REPLACE HIM AS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS IN THE  
DAY-TO-DAY RUNNING OF THE ADMINISTRATION AND ECONOMIC APPARATUS OF  
THE GOVERNMENT. KOSYGIN IS KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN ILL RECENTLY AND IS  
SAID TO HAVE TRIED SEVERAL TIMES IN THE PAST TO RETIRE.

PODGORNYY'S PRESENT JOB IS CERTAINLY LESS DEMANDING THAN KOSYGIN'S.  
THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS,  
IN CONNECTION WITH KOSYGIN'S MOVE UPSTAIRS, SHOULD THAT TAKE PLACE,  
WOULD PROVIDE EVIDENCE AS TO THE WAY IN WHICH THE POLITBURO  
INTENDS TO GO ABOUT RENEWING ITSELF. IF IT IS DECIDED, FOR INSTANCE,  
TO BRING SOMEONE FROM THE PROVINCES TO THE CENTER, TWO OF THE  
MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES ARE ROMANOV (WHO RUNS LENINGRAD) AND  
SHCHERBITSKIY (WHO RUNS THE UKRAINE). BOTH SPOKE AT THE MAY 24  
PLENUM AND ROMANOV RECENTLY PUBLISHED A LONG ARTICLE IN PRAVDA IN

WHICH HE EXPLAINED THE SUCCESS OF HIS RUNNING THE ECONOMY OF LENINGRAD AND IMPLIED THAT HE SHOULD BE GIVEN THE CHANCE TO DO THE SAME AT THE ALL-UNION LEVEL (MOSCOW 7197 NOTAL). BOTH SHCHERBITSKIY AND ROMANOV ARE YOUNG ENOUGH TO TAKE OVER FROM THE PRESENT SENIOR LEADERSHIP AND HAVE A GOOD MANY YEARS AT THE TOP. (THE ONE OTHER POLITBURO MEMBER WHO SPOKE AT THE PLENUM, GRISHIN, IS ALREADY 62.) THE APPOINTMENT OF EITHER TO ONE OF THE PRESTIGIOUS CENTRAL JOBS WOULD BE A CLEAR, MAJOR STEP UP.

9. HYPOTHESIS FOUR: SOMEBODY NEW. IF BEZHNEV AND KOSYGIN BOTH STAY WHERE THEY ARE, THE MAN CHOSEN TO ASSUME NEW PROMINENCE COULD DO SO AS PODGORNYY'S SUCCESSOR. THIS WOULD ASSURE THE ONE CHOSEN A GREAT DEAL OF PUBLIC EXPOSURE. IT WOULD ALLOW BEZHNEV TO PLACE HIS MAN AT THE SYMBOLIC HEAD OF THE USSR. THE MAN CHOSEN WOULD PROBABLY BE ONE OF THE SENIOR CENTRAL LEADERS, (E.G., KIRILENKO OR USTINOV)

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BUT IT COULD ALSO BE ONE OF THOSE MENTIONED ABOVE.

10. SUSLOV'S ROLE IN PODGORNYY'S REMOVAL IS SO FAR TANTILIZINGLY OBSCURE. HE HAS BEEN ON THE PARTY SECRETARIAT FOR 30 YEARS AND ON THE POLITBURO FOR 21 - THE LONGEST SERVING MEMBER OF THE SECRETARIAT AND, WITH KOSYGIN, THE LONGEST SERVING MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HE ENGINEERED A TEST OF WILLS IN THE POLITBURO MEETING AT WHICH PODGORNYY BECAME THE VICTIM, PERHAPS OVER THE ROLE OF THE PARTY IN THE NEW CONSTITUTION. WE HAVE NO HARD EVIDENCE ON SUSLOV'S INVOLVEMENT, BUT HIS RECENT PROMINENCE IN THE PRESS SUGGESTS THAT HE MAY HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN THE MANEUVERING. WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT SUSLOV IS HIMSELF SEEKING TO BECOME HEAD OF STATE.

11. HYPOTHESIS FIVE: THE POLICY DISPUTE. WE DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT A DISPUTE OVER A SPECIFC POLICY DECISION - DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN - WAS THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF THE OUSTER OF PODGORNYY, ALTHOUGH WE DOUBT THIS. IT IS OF COURSE POSSIBLE THAT A DISPUTE OVER A PARTICULAR DECISION WAS THE PROXIMATE CAUSE, AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT ISSUES WERE USED TO MAKE THE CASE FOR PODGORNYY'S REMOVAL.

12. WHO STANDS TO BENEFIT? IF BREZHNEV BECOMES HEAD OF STATE OR IS ABLE TO GET ONE OF HIS MEN IN ANY OF THE TOP POSITIONS, HE HAS CLEARLY STRENGTHENED HIS OWN POSITION. PODGORNYY DID NOT REPRESENT ANY MAJOR CONSTITUENCY --THE ARMY, KGB, GOVERNMENT APPARATUS OR PARTY--SO IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT ANY OF THE MAJOR SOURCES OF POWER ARE NECESSARILY AFFECTED BY HIS DEPARTURE. IN ANY CASE, IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO TELL WHICH GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS ARE LIKELY TO HAVE GAINED OR LOST.

13. WHAT NEXT? THE NEXT OCCASIONS ON WHICH WE ARE LIKELY TO LEARN ANYTHING OF IMPORTANCE CONCERNING THE REASONS BEHIND PODGORNYY'S DEPARTURE WILL COME SHOULD THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION BE PUBLISHED BETWEEN NOW AND THE NEXT SESSION OF THE SUPREME SOVIET AND IN ANY

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CASE AT THAT SESSION, SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 16. LEGALLY, THE SUPREME SOVIET STANDING EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE COULD REMOVE PODGORNYY EVEN BEFORE THEN, ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO EVIDENT REASON WHY IT SHOULD. ASSUMING THAT PODGORNYY IS REPLACED AS CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDIUM OF THE SUPREME SOVIET, EITHER IMMEDIATELY OR AFTER AN INTERVAL OF A FEW MONTHS, THE NAMING OF HIS REPLACEMENT WILL GIVE US CLUES TO SHIFTS IN POWER WITHIN THE POLITBURO.

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## Message Attributes

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**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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